MUTINY!

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER FROM BLACK FLAG SYDNEY

Linocut produced in 1933 by The Workers Art Collective to protest evictions

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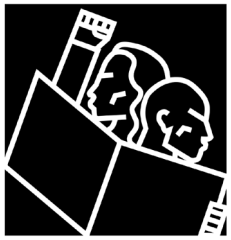

We would like to acknowledge that the land on which we live, work, and organise is unceded Aboriginal land. We pay our respects to the Gadigal people, on whose lands Black Flag Sydney is based. We offer our absolute and unequivocal solidarity to all First Nations peoples fighting for liberation, here and overseas. We stand together, now and always.

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Editorial

Edition #13 is here. After weeks on end as a half-laid-up file, waiting to be finally finished, it's come out the other side of publishing through everything in our organising.

Between an attempted Trump assassination, "PARTYGIRL" Charli xcx's masterpiece *BRAT*, a supposed Olympic Games (I didn't realise it was happening right now till I was reading about MEAA Nine workers taking industrial action), and whatever other shit catches the world's attention, there's been what feels like arduous battles as of late being fought in the Sydney left. Like the organising to agitate the NSW Labor conference (a story for the next edition perhaps), NTEU election campaigning, pressure to pass the Equality Bill now and in full, and solidaristic action for Palestine – whether it's in our rank-and-file union membership groups, student collectives, community action organisations, or in the broader movement – to name a few. Not to mention the happenings in Black Flag, as we've had our bi-annual conference, handover of roles, sparked discussions on social insertion across social and labour movements, and as usual, engaged in discussions across inter-state anarchist-communist, platformist organisations, reading groups, zine fairs, workshops and forums. During certain heights, it can all feel overwhelming, but it's how we keep our sights on socialism and applying principles into practice.

Still, in our organising battles, through the campaign grunt work, the debates and challenges with liberalism, bro-majorities, sectarianism, personal life, and forever-fluctuating sizes across social movements, we must sustain ourselves and critically evaluate where we're going. *Mutiny* sets out to do just that: it collects our thoughts, reports on actions, and realises positions and pathways forward. So we hope this edition will be as useful for you as it is for us.

Mutiny #13 is 'so Julia' (uh uh, uh-uh-uh).

On Kanaky-New Caledonia

Preamble and translation of 'Kanaky: the time of the colonies is over!' by the Union communiste libertaire (UCL)

In May of this year, large-scale unrest broke out in the French Melanesian territory of Kanaky, more commonly known as New Caledonia. Large sectors of the Indigenous Kanak population protested against a proposal for a new voting law that would expand the electoral power of the white settler population. So far over fifteen hundred people have been arrested, over one hundred and fifty have been injured, and nine have been killed. The protests picked back up again in late June after key Kanak independence activists were detained and transported to mainland France.

Australians generally think of Kanaky-New Caledonia as a happy-go-lucky land of tourist resorts. In actual fact, it is a hotbed of social unrest with a severely divided population. The protests from the Kanak population have not simply been driven by pro-independence sentiments, but by general disillusionment with the country's economic situation. According to the official French statistics, over 70% of Kanaks live below the poverty line, and around 20% are unemployed.

The Australian government is watching the unrest keenly. Officially, Australia is neutral on the independence question, especially when dealing with the Independent Melanesian states like Fiji and Papua New Guinea which are broadly supportive of the independence forces. However, the Australian government is fundamentally pro-France. In December Penny Wong signed an agreement with the French minister for Foreign Affairs that would allow for increased reciprocal access to each other's military bases. The brewing conflict between Chinese and American-led imperialism has meant that even its location alone is significant. The country is also very valuable: its nickel deposits are crucial for the production of electric vehicle batteries.

Even if Kanaky-New Caledonia secures independence, it would still be confronted with many of the political-economic problems it faces now. However, a grassroots struggle against French colonialism could develop into something more: a struggle against colonialism that encompasses the entire region and goes beyond just the fight for independence .

The Asia-Pacific region is a pressure cooker. Class conflict is getting more and more acute in countries like Papua New Guinea as capitalism continues to overturn traditional Indigenous societies, turning customary land into private property and throwing its members into the working class. We don't need to wait until the next war to find the solutions to these problems: solidarity can and should be built between workers in Australia and workers in the Asia-Pacific *now.*

Below is a translation of an article published by the Union Communiste Libertaire (Libertarian Communist Union; UCL) in their newspaper Alternative Libertaire. *The UCL is a platformist organisation (i.e., in the same tradition as us) that is based in France and is active in the Kanak solidarity movement there. The growth of a similar solidarity movement in Australia would be a welcome development.*

Settler colonialism, whether Australian or French, deserves to fall!

Kanaky: the time of the colonies is over! The arrival of Emmanuel Macron confirming that he wants 'neither retreat nor delay but a call for calm,' has sown confusion and cemented a climate of grief and fear which continues to reign. The dissolution of the National Assembly has diverted the media from the problem which remains nonetheless just as important to resolve: the end of the colonisation of Kanaky.

Kanaky, or Kanaky-New Caledonia, is an archipelago of islands situated in the Pacific Ocean between Australia and New Zealand, registered on the list of territories "to decolonise" by the UN. The 1998 Nouméa accords were supposed to launch a 20-year process of decolonisation, resulting in three referendums on the full sovereignty of Kanaky, but the French State wants to maintain its grip for geopolitical and economic interests. Indeed, Kanaky has geographical proximity to China as well as maritime and mineral resources.

The UCL was already denouncing this situation several weeks before the beginning of the revolts, which began when the police opened fire upon protesters opposing the constitutional reform. This was in fact planned for a 'thawing of the electoral body' in Kanaky. It consisted – we speak in the past tense, given it was temporarily suspended with the dissolution of the National Assembly – of enlarging the electoral body of Kanaky to integrate the latest arrivals, the majority from France, accentuating the political minority status of the Kanak people, despite them being the Indigenous population. The objective was to authorise as voters every person who had settled in the territory for ten years. This was equivalent to adding 25,000 new voters to an electoral roll of 180,000; something considerable.

Worse still, we learned on the 19th June of the arrest of 11 independentist figures, notably from the CCAT (Field Action Coordination Unit). Their offices were searched in the process, as these figures of the movement were accused of being responsible for revolts which the French government themselves had provoked, in getting the police to open fire on the Kanak people during a protest, and by their forced passage of a colonial reform without any consultation.

This is essential for all settler colonialism, as it was in Algeria. For 171 years, the French State has firstly decimated the Kanak peoples, then organised the replacement of the Indigenous population with waves of immigration.

The French State has not renounced its colonial empire, and is strongly destabilising societies which remain colonised, confronting the people with extreme violence: on the part of the French police, but also the settler militias wanting to conserve their privileges and the colonial situation.

It is time for the French State to withdraw from this territory situated more than 22,000 km from Paris. The time will come for the inhabitants of Kanaky to decide for themselves the future society that they want to construct, in re-discovering at the same time their access to the most fundamental rights, to know the right to their history, to their land, to their culture, to their dignity and to their self-determination.

Solidarity with all the anticolonial people and organisations, from the UGTG (Workers Union of Guadeloupe) of Guadeloupe to the FLNKS (Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front) of Kanaky, who suffer under and struggle against the colonial government of the French State, in territories called "overseas," or in the decolonised countries still under its influence.

Complete solidarity with the Kanak people and with the independentist movement in its entirety! 171 years of occupation is enough: the time of the colonies is over! *(Union communiste libertaire, le 22 juin 2024.)*

‘Build a society based on workers’ councils’

Guest author Tim Briedis, host of the People’s History of Australia, *writes on the Self Management Group (1971–77)*

Out of the wave of global radicalism in the Sixties and Seventies came the libertarian socialist Self Management Group (SMG). Based in Brisbane/Meanjin, SMG’s size and level of organisation was unique. It had a ‘two-tier’ structure with at its peak 200–300 activists in cells and 60–70 full members. It was arguably the preeminent far left group in the city throughout its existence from 1971–77.

Although beginning with a core of 8 people, from 1971–73, SMG grew rapidly. Even that keen friend of revolutionaries ASIO noted its growth, writing that it had ‘developed a maturity and crystallisation of purpose’ and that ‘its policy of Self Management/Workers Control … has a distinct appeal to all sections of the Community in this present day and age.’

SMG were involved in work stoppages, slow-downs and agitating for self-management. Through the University of Queensland cell a 1974 campaign against high workloads and assessment won some demands.

SMG were prolific leafleters, producing an enormous array of material. They focused on ‘the politics … of day-to-day … existence not the usual connotations of politics.’ One particularly sharp one, Boredom at the Office, declared that:

> It’s nine o’clock. Once again I’m at my utterly boring monotonous job. My eyes wander to the grey haired man near me. This office has drained thirty years of his life. I can expect the same.

‘The response to it was electric,’ recalled one member. The leaflets were used to effectively build the organisation.

High schools were sites of leafleting too. The leaflets were condemned in parliament and were illegal but they continued leafleting regardless. One member, Greg George, recalled that:

> Several carloads of us would get to school during recess or lunchtime … the kids loved it. They’d rush out of the classrooms. We’d hand out the leaflets bamn bamn bamn and then we’d leave before we got caught.

In 1973, they distributed the broadsheet Self Management and the High Schools to nearly every school in Brisbane. One school with an SMG cell, an activist recalled, saw more progressive courses introduced while another had mass meetings around dress codes and authoritarianism. The Evans Deakins docks were described by ASIO as a ‘hot bed of industrial intrigue’ and SMG were involved in work stoppages, slow-downs and agitating for self-management. Through the University of Queensland cell a 1974 campaign against high workloads and assessment won some demands.

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The SMG did have significant flaws. Members recalled experiencing serious sexism in the group, to the extent that Barbara Hart remembered that:

> It was very difficult for women to get in (to the SMG). You had to get in through a man. … We used to joke that every woman in it was the partner of a man (in the SMG). Eventually something happened and they let other people join.

They were unable to work in solidarity with Aboriginal peoples, despite the important struggles going on in this era. Some former members argued that they were very hostile and sectarian to other left groups. Ultra-leftism was a concern, with some critiquing the overwhelming focus on revolutionary self-management as an end goal, rather than on supporting more tangible social movements. Eventually these tensions caused a three-way split in 1977, with some members joining the Trotskyist International Socialists, others the more feminist and anarchist oriented Self Management Organisation and the ‘old guard’ of the SMG forming the Libertarian Socialist Organisation.

Yet despite its faults, the SMG does show that it is possible for left-libertarians to create substantial organisations in this continent, beyond the small groups of a half-dozen to a dozen people that have dominated the anarchist scene. Its focus on daily life and novel organisation into cells are intriguing strategies for radicals.

SMG never lost sight of its utopian goal of abolishing capitalism. They brooked no compromise with electoral politics. In December 1973, in a referendum on prices and incomes, they advised:

> If habit drags your tired body to the local prison house for kids (school) to cast your compulsory, meaningless vote, that you write across the paper, ‘Build a society based on workers’ councils, replace the parliament and bosses with a self-managed society,’ you might feel a tingling sense of joy at the first such productive work you have done in a polling booth!

Remembering them is not just a commemorative activity, but a small part of reasserting the banner of revolution into the ideological domain of the present.

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HOUSING

Their crisis and ours

The severity of the housing crisis over the past two decades has led to an existential shift among Australians. The prospect of an average Australian worker owning their own detached home in a suburb has become so remote that young people have simply given up on it. Gentrification has crept across the city, turning formerly working-class areas into playgrounds for the upper middle class. New apartment complexes and housing projects are built rapidly and poorly, without proper amenities or social planning, by some of the slimiest property developers known to man, their development approvals (DAs) shunted through by dodgy local councillor friends. The rights of public housing tenants are diminishing, as actual public housing gets turned into rip-off "social housing" and waiting lists blow out to ludicrous levels.

On one level, the housing crisis is not new. Workers have always lived in substandard housing, paying too much for too little on the private market or have been forced to stay in long queues for public housing – which is usually of negligible quality anyway. What is new is the severity of the crisis, and the fact that it is now hitting all types of people in Australian society. No longer are housing pressures just focused on low-wage workers, Indigenous people, the unemployed, pensioners – they're also hitting large parts of the middle class, from higher-earning workers to small business owners and relatively well-off professionals.

It's this general feeling of discontent and the threat it poses to their electoral prospects that drives politicians to act. Parties across the spectrum make an effort to seem like they're doing something: whether that's Labor's Housing Australian Future Fund (HAFF), the Coalition's various saving and loan schemes, or the Greens' public housing plans. At times, politicians attempt to use housing-related discontent to mobilise for directly pro-capitalist policies; note the way both Labor and Coalition politicians now rail against anti-development NIMBYs as the brick wall preventing the private sector from building houses for everyone.

When discussing government policies on housing, you can't forget what the point of government is in the first place, and why they implement these policies. They don't do it out of the goodness of their hearts, or out of some charitable motive. The state is there to function as the "general capitalist," advancing the rule of capitalism, whether through the carrot or the stick. This is the basic reason we're sceptical of any politicians aiming to solve the housing crisis on our behalf – including "Mr. Renter" himself, Max Chandler-Mather.

On one level, politicians like Chandler-Mather can promise panaceas because they are so remote from power. The Greens are unlikely to form government any time soon, either on the state or federal level, and they know it – the best they can hope for is to play hardball from the crossbench. This explains why they can talk a big game but in the end capitulate, with a few crumbs thrown their way by Labor: first with the climate safeguard mechanism, then with the HAFF. Should the Greens ever reach a point where forming government became a possibility, then their policies would moderate substantially.

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We don't want to suggest that Australian governments are incapable of implementing reforms. They clearly are, and should the crisis intensify – and with it, competition for votes – more reforms may be implemented. However, we want to point to something essential about reforms: they're not dictated by the whims of individual politicians, but by the realities of administering capitalism that are imposed on them. Neither do the reforms by themselves necessarily amount to benefits for workers; if workers are to gain anything, it's through fighting for ourselves – from below.

The origins of the "golden age." While promoting his party's proposal for a massive public housing construction drive, Chandler-Mather has referred to the similar post-WWII building drive as precedent. This reference is intended to make his policy seem more credible and realistic, while also furthering the Greens' appeal to disaffected Labor supporters – telling them that they are the rightful inheritors of the kind of social democracy that the Australian Labor Party (ALP) abandoned under Hawke and Keating.

However, this obscures the reality of the post-war building boom. While it's certainly true that massive amounts of public housing was built by the government after WWII, Chandler-Mather's reformism obscures the class conflict at the heart of post-war reconstruction. The story of the post-war reforms are not a story of governments acting kindly towards workers, but of large-scale plans for the expansion of Australian capitalism, and the determined effort of the working class to fight back.

The post-war housing programmes in particular were primarily motivated by two general, related factors: the terrifyingly bad quality of Australian housing stock, and the Australian economy's need for millions more workers than it previously had. As the 1930s came to a close and the 1940s began, Australia's cities were a shit show. A very large proportion of Australia's housing stock consisted of slums, which troubled Australian reformers. Slums were blamed for everything from crime to 'the modern discontented outlook.' Other reformers put it more plainly: the cost of subsidising public housing would be balanced out by savings on other government expenditures, like policing, education and sanitation.

Resistance to the sluggish social improvements in conditions post-war came quickly, and it was not government reformers that deserve credit for changing them. Neighbourhood committees and local protest groups sprung up to agitate for better conditions in terms of housing, and the … union movement, which took advantage of low unemployment to press home claims put to the side during the war.

The declining birth-rate was a particular concern to Australian capitalists, who banked on a massive growth in the population as a key part of a future economy. According to the historian Stuart MacIntyre, by the early 1940s, there was a widespread consensus that the then-population of 7 million was inadequate, 'a figure of 20 million within 15–20 years was commonly used' as a necessary goal.

This population growth plan did not have direct financial motivations; they were also concerned with maintaining and expanding the nascent Australian empire. Planners, politicians and reformers were explicitly concerned with the spectre of the hordes of Asia, threatening to engulf the white race. 'Australia cannot expect to hold indefinitely this large continent with the small population it now possesses,' said Chifley in 1943.

Australian capitalists were also scared of the moral effects of bad housing. Not only were slums seen as petri dishes for the growth of criminals, their very existence would drive disenchantment with the capitalist system itself.

As the Australian economy geared up for massive demographic changes, it was clear that this situation could not last. The gears began to turn during the war. The federal government concluded that the private sector had been unable to produce any great number of new dwellings, thanks to the damage of the Great Depression, and the reconfiguration of the economy that was needed to fight World War II. In 1945, Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement was signed, arranging for the funding, construction and allocation of vast numbers of new houses.

Class war in the 40s and 50s. The lofty goals of the planners crashed with the reality of the post-war situation. In 1945 the federal government planned for half of residential construction to be public housing, but by 1947 the government was revising its estimate downward to a third, and as the decade ended it was demonstrated that only 17% of residential construction was public.

For an example of how the public housing schemes ended up serving capitalists, not workers, we can look to Victoria. There the state government, in assistance with the federal government, built a large amount of public housing with a clear purpose. Public housing was built around oil refineries and car factories in Geelong, around coal mines and power plants in the LaTrobe valley, and in the factories springing up on Melbourne's fringe.

Looking at this case, we can also see that "public housing" is not synonymous with "good housing." Roads in these developments were left unsealed, schools and hospitals were drastically overcrowded, and transport was poor; these problems would not be fixed until the 1950s.

Resistance to the sluggish social improvements in conditions post-war came quickly, and it was not government reformers that deserve credit for changing them. Neighbourhood committees and local protest groups sprung up to agitate for better conditions in terms of housing, and the most significant class resistance would come from the union movement, which took advantage of low unemployment to press home claims put to the side during the war. In 1945 there were around a thousand industrial disputes, with around two and a half million work days lost to strikes. Workers were fighting back *en masse,* and succeeding. They were securing serious wage increases, as well as decreases in hours.

In fact, most historians agree that federal and state Labor governments post-war spent an enormous amount of time trying to contain this strike wave; it was one of their primary tasks. Where possible, the government funnelled industrial disputes into courts

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of arbitration that dragged out cases for years. They leaned on the union officials to wind up industrial action, promising productivity-derived gains in exchange for restraint on wages. Neither were they scared of intervening with force when necessary; they did so on a number of occasions.

Taking post-war housing policy and isolating it from this context obscures the nature of governmental reforms, and also places undue emphasis on the role we should expect governments to play in improving working class living standards. This is an error of historical analysis, but one that is relevant to contemporary politics. When looking back to this period and figuring out how better wages and conditions can be achieved, it's the *strike wave of hundreds of thousands of workers* that needs to be emphasised, not the actions of the government trying to cope with it.

What year is it? It's true that the government has the capacity to build public housing *en masse* – but will it, in 2024 or beyond? Looking at the post-war public housing programme, it becomes clear that it was implemented as a result of a few factors, foremost among them the needs of a booming economy. Australian capitalism needed drastically more people; it needed more people to work in the factories, farms, and on the enormous "nation-building" projects, like the Snowy-Hydro scheme. These workers needed to be housed, and the government intervened where the private market failed.

Eighty years later, the Australian economy looks totally different. It is hard to see a boom on the horizon; it is even harder to see any future economic development being driven by massive population growth. In fact, the Australian economy does not bank on the mass importation of workers, but on incredibly restrictive, targeted schemes, allowing only migrants meeting particular skill shortages. Australian economic planners do not see the future economy in terms of population booms, and their general focus is now on arresting the decline in productivity growth.

Neither is the working class on the organisational level it was in the 1930s. Australian unions now not only represent a much smaller percentage of the workforce – in the 40s and 50s around half the workforce was in a union, now it's something like 12.5% – but in the aftermath of the Accords they are less militant too, and more integrated than ever into the state-led arbitration system.

A working class way out. The point of re-telling this history – buried under a lot of left nostalgia for social democracy – is not to say that Chandler-Mather is a racist who wants public housing so Australians will breed more and be less prone to slum crime. It's that the state institutes reforms under particular conditions, *on its own terms*. It holds off on reforms when it is not required to implement them, preferring other options to put off popular pressure. When it does implement them, it implements them in the interest of capitalism, not the interest of workers.

We are not saying that the working class should be indifferent to improvements in conditions and wages under capitalism, but that we should fight for them with our own hands. *That* is the moral of the post-war story: that the gains were not granted from above by the Labor Party, but secured through mass strike actions by the unions. The goal of any successful politician is to ensure the stability and profitability of Australian capitalism. The goal of any successful union movement, on the other hand, is to undercut that system, to fight it tooth and nail, and to move towards getting rid of it.

Indeed, in order to set ourselves on the right path, we have to avoid separating the housing crisis from the general crisis of working class living standards. "Housing is too expensive" is ultimately another way of saying "wages are too low." The housing crisis is another manifestation of one of the fundamental problems of capitalism – that workers cannot live decent lives on the wages they receive.

Neither are we in the same boat as the other groups of people hit hard by the increased cost of housing. The working class is the class that is dependent on wage labour in order to live; we aren't the same as small business owners or the children of the wealthy who may also be struggling to pay the rent. We don't have any property to fall back on, or inherited wealth.

This class framing points to what is actually needed to fight for better housing for workers – namely, an all-out fight for higher wages, encompassing the public and private sector, going beyond inflation. Instead of relying on politicians to implement some scheme to

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There have been a number of cases where the government has let public housing turn to squalor, incentivising tenants to get out and then selling off the public housing on the private market, or turning it over to "non-profit" social housing providers. Governments will inevitably look to cut money wherever they can, and in public housing, that means attacking tenants. Money is still the name of the game, and it takes a movement of workers to fight back.

increase housing stock, we can rely on the strength of our fellow workers – which is most significant at work, at the point of production. Instead of building up one or another political party, we can build up the strength of our unions, and turn them into *real* fighting bodies.

When it comes to public housing, we should stand clearly in favour of it, pushing for its drastic expansion. Neither should unions stand absent from this discussion, or be content with submitting resolutions to the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and ALP conferences every now and again. However, *the struggle does not end there*. Every public housing tenant knows this. However good public housing is, the government bureaucracy is a landlord, and a miserable one at that.

A substantial amount of the time of tenant unions and housing activist groups is spent on compelling the housing bureaucrats to actually do their jobs. The department may not be under the direct pressure of the need to make money on the private market, but they still have an incentive to undercut their own tenants and get rid of them whenever they can.

By taking matters into our own hands, we not only secure better living standards in the here-and-now, we also develop the struggle that might abolish capitalism altogether.

There have been a number of cases where the government has let public housing turn to squalor, incentivising tenants to get out and then selling off the public housing on the private market, or turning it over to "non-profit" social housing providers. Governments will inevitably look to cut money wherever they can, and in public housing, that means attacking tenants. Money is still the name of the game, and it takes a movement of workers to fight back.

Organised groups like South East Queensland Union of Renters (SEQUR) in Queensland, or the Renters and Housing Union Australia (RAHU) in Victoria have managed to secure victories for both private and public tenants using ground-up tactics. NSW housing advocates are currently campaigning for greater legal protections for renters. These kinds of struggles can only be intensified when they combine with workplace activity.

If workers *don't* fight back on class lines, then disaster could follow. It's not surprising that anti-class sentiment like racism can grow in the absence of active class struggle. The mainline understanding of housing is essentially that of supply and demand, with the solution coming through increased supply – whether that means a deregulated private sector building dwellings *en masse,* or a state body doing the same thing.

The flipside to this, though, is the implied alternate solution – decreasing demand, namely through restricting migration. This has long been advocated for by the political right but it has caught on as a popular belief among everyday people. It's a belief that has the potential to turn dangerous. In Ireland, a similar housing crisis has fed into a rising, violent anti-immigrant movement.

The precise means by which the ruling class applies band-aids to the problem is less important than the role the working class might play in forcing them to do so. After all, keeping all things equal, there is no *fundamental* difference between the costs of housing being borne by the private capitalist or the public capitalist, the state – even though workers in public housing justifiably hold on to what they have now, knowing that the alternative of privatised housing is worse. Rather than looking to politicians to solve our problems, we need only to look at our fellow workers. By taking matters into our own hands, we not only secure better living standards in the here-and-now, we also develop the struggle that might abolish capitalism altogether.

This is the only serious perspective on the housing crisis: that it can only be solved by the abolition of private property, which would allow for humanity's immense productive capacity to be used for human needs. It is these needs that we need to build society around, not the needs of property developers, government bureaucrats, bosses and landlords. That will take a struggle that will go beyond the one terrifying Australian capitalists in the 1930s, but it's one that has never been so necessary.

Why anarchism needs feminism, and feminism needs anarchism

On anarcha-feminism

We are anarchists who seek to fight sexism within society, our unions, and movements. So, our feminist organising should be anarchist, and our anarchist organising feminist. This article addresses three questions arising in response to this goal. First, what common ground does anarcho-feminism share with other strands of socialist feminism? Second, how is it different, and how does feminism contribute to anarchist theory, which in itself advocates for the abolition of all hierarchies? Third, how does anarchism equip our feminist organising?

Capitalism and sexism. Socialist feminists believe that the creation of gendered social relations was fundamental to the development of capitalism, and that capitalism continues to govern the form and function of sexism today.

Marx's theory of 'primitive accumulation' argues that capitalism could not have developed without a prior concentration of capital and labour, which occurred by capitalists forcibly separating workers from the means of production and forcing them to work as wage labourers. Marxist feminist scholars argue that capitalism's development also required the accumulation of divisions within the working class and hierarchies built upon gender, race, and other axes of oppression. For example, the state weaponised the female body as an instrument for labour's reproduction through abortion laws. It banned women from paid work, forced them into economic subservience to a husband, and rendered invisible their reproductive work within the family unit. Capitalism's development required the state to control women's bodies to ensure the reproduction of labour and to look after male workers and children for free, creating a gender hierarchy within the working class.

Today, care work remains undervalued and feminised even when it is performed as wage labour, as seen in Australia's early childhood education 'crisis.' Internationally, abortion laws control women's reproduction. Women are overwhelmingly the victims of rape and sexual assault. Gender divisions and misogyny divide the working class and suppress organised opposition to capital. In so many ways, the gender hierarchy within the working class continues to sustain capitalism.

Feminism's contribution to anarchism. While socialist feminists can agree on the relationship between capitalism and sexism, most anarcha-feminist strategies are informed by the anarchist principle of 'means and ends' – that is, that socialism can only be achieved through the activities of non-hierarchical egalitarian movements, because these activities will develop people who can self-direct their lives and participate in their communities equally, as required in a socialist society. In line with this, anarcho-communist and anarcho-syndicalist women argued that social movements had to prefigure the non-oppressive interpersonal relationships that we want during communism.

Some anarchists objected to the *Mujeres Libres'* existence because they believed that female emancipation should not be separated from class struggle, and that an autonomous organisation undermined the working-class movement's unity. These objections overlooked that sexism was what was in fact undermining the working class's unity, resulting in sexist attitudes within anarchist organisations that discouraged women's participation.

The *Mujeres Libres,* an autonomous anarchist organisation founded in 1936 by anarchist women in Madrid and Barcelona, is one historical example of anarcho-communist women who advocated for such a prefiguration through their publication of the same name, often in opposition to male comrades. They positioned themselves against the feminist movement which sought 'equality of women within an existing system of privileges,' and instead organised to improve their representation in the broader anarchist and trade union movements.

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> Struggled, they went out on strike, etc., but inside the house, worse than nothing. I think we should have set an example with our own lives, lived differently in accordance with what we said we wanted. But no, (for them), the struggle was outside. *Inside the home, (women's desires) were purely utopian.*

Other anarchists argued that women had to improve their own self-esteem, which was what prevented their participation in anarchist movements. While the *Mujeres Libres* acknowledged that women internalised patriarchal norms, they advocated that women's participation in direct action for their own emancipation would best transform them into individuals who could participate equally with men. The group organised basic educational programs for all workers, including literacy classes, technical courses and apprenticeships, as well as 'social formation' classes focusing on how women could act independently of men in their lives. During the Civil War, the organisation served as a home for women who wished to support the anti-fascist movement, orchestrating talks in collectivised workplaces, rallies in liberated territories, and health clinics in both cities and rural towns. The *Mujeres Libres* developed the

First meeting of the Mujeres Libres.

kinds of capacities needed in women to act independently and freely, under capitalism and socialism, rather than wishing for gender equality once socialism had arrived.

It should be noted that the group was quite stridently opposed to sex work and sex workers, a legacy which the Spanish anarchist movement has inherited to a worrying degree. This legacy is not solely the responsibility of the *Mujeres Libres,* though, and in other respects they were the most radical and principled wing of the movement. They opposed the collaboration of the CNT officials with the Republican bourgeoisie towards the end of the war, and worked to suppress attempts to racialise the conflict. Their example is one which still inspires and empowers many working women and anarchists generally, and we argue it should be celebrated as a crucial example of women's independent organising within mass movements for gender emancipation.

What does this mean for feminist organising? It is inadequate for anarchist movements or organisations to adopt consensus decision making and non-hierarchical structures. We must also be alive to oppressive interpersonal relations, or else sexism will take on a new form under socialism.

This principle importantly informs how anarchist organisations and movements should address sexual violence, both within our organisations and in society at-large. While a liberal framing of gendered violence treats sexual violence largely as isolated incidents which require accountability processes that address individual behaviour, often through legal frameworks, anarchists know that we have to collectively address the root causes which are based in coercive, gendered hierarchies prevalent throughout society. However, people who raise allegations of sexual violence in left-wing organisations are often accused of being 'informants' and 'undermining the unity of the organisation.' Such claims not only dismiss allegations and calls for accountability, but demonise feminism and counterpose it to class struggle.

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As anarchist women have argued for decades, it is in fact the gender hierarchy within the working class itself that undermines class struggle, and the tolerance of sexism within our organisations which hinders revolutionary capacity. Infamously, the Socialist Workers' Party in the United Kingdom split in 2013 over how the central committee handled rape allegations made by a 19-year-old member against a senior party member. Those who left the party noted that party members had raised concerns for years regarding the leadership's use of 'feminism' as a 'swear word' against anybody who seemed 'too concerned' about gender issues.

Anarcha-feminism is also resolutely abolitionist, identifying the capitalist state and the injustice system as causing, rather than mitigating or preventing, social harm. For example, anarcha-feminists have a long history of supporting the decriminalisation and industrial organisation of sex work. Louise Michel from the Paris Commune and Itō Noe from Japan argued that since poverty drove people to sex work, it was necessary to abolish poverty through social revolution. Sex workers themselves should be the key agents in this change. This can be compared to the calls for expanded police powers by sex worker-exclusionary radical and carceral "feminists," despite the obvious threat that would pose predominantly for sex workers and other minority groups, with flow on effects for broader society. This position may also be contrasted with the antagonistic orientation of most Sydney socialist organisations against sex work decriminalisation. These organisations have a long-established commitment to opposing or, at the very least, abstaining from sex worker liberation efforts, a stance which hinders the self-organisation of some of the most severely exploited feminised workers.

We should not reject all the principles of feminism simply because we oppose the bourgeois manifestations of this movement. By understanding how capitalism sustains sexism in its current form, we can organise against both exploitation and oppression at the same time. By responding to sexism, misogyny and sexual violence in a principled manner in our own movements, anarchists can begin the fight for a world free from capitalism, the state, and patriarchy.

The Black Lives Matter demand for abolition

And why we should fight to keep it alive

In 2020, during the height of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, the streets of Sydney were flooded with over 50,000 protesters, consistently calling for the cops to be disarmed, defunded, and dismantled. Support for the explicit abolition of the police and the wider carceral system was one of the defining political aspects of the movement, and for a time *was mainstream*. In the US, books advocating for the abolition of the police and prison system were reviewed in major publications, and the New York Times published an op-ed arguing for it. Some Democratic Party politicians – however insincere – even advocated for it.

In the few short years since, however, we seem to have experienced a collective *amnesia*. As anarchists, we have always held to a politics of abolition, but some sections of the left have opportunistically dropped and taken up these demands inconsistently in recent years. A large part of this is due to BLM losing momentum, but it also signifies a rightward shift, a *less radical and defensive turn* towards a singular focus on abolishing our local New South Wales anti-protest laws, without any discussion of broader abolitionist politics.

Police militarisation and brutality have only intensified since 2020. The anti-protest laws currently on the books are the toughest ever and the arguments from 2020 are even more relevant now than they were then. In every struggle the left is engaged in, we find the cops there, enforcing the will of the state and capitalists violently.

The exact criticisms of abolitionism given vary, but are often based on a paternalistic attitude towards workers and their ability to engage with anti-carceral arguments; a reflection of their more general unwillingness to engage with workers about anti-capitalist politics. More generally, these leftists are pessimistic towards the ability of different anti-police social struggles to be linked up. In other instances, abolitionism is attacked outright as being "ultra."

For the reformists on the left, abolitionist politics are unpalatable because they threaten their popularity on election night. They also know pretty well that abolishing the police means abolishing capitalism – a subject they have no intention of broaching. The wider revolutionary left recognises that cops are agents of the state, but have similar fears of "alienating workers"; they also know that police abolition conflicts with their quiet dream of becoming the masters of their own state.

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Unsurprisingly, the anti-protest laws are also being used to suppress unionists and activists protesting Israel's genocide in Gaza; as many as 40 people were arrested at two Port Botany actions for Palestine alone. Many of these people face the possibility of years in gaol or massive fines. Not to mention the homophobic, transphobic, and racist abuse metered out to comrades arrested when they were at the cop shops.

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The police's international connections don't stop at oppressing protests that target oppression overseas. Australian cops have been directly trained by Israeli experts, and there's even been embedded New York City Police Department intelligence officers in the city. Police techniques developed in the United States are exported here, which gives added relevance to the significant protest movement against Cop City in Atlanta, Georgia. The chronic use of the police as a tool of colonial repression ensures that the links to international western imperialism are many and deep.

As the police become increasingly militarised, the interchangeability between it and the army becomes concerningly more so. The police are not only turning into a paramilitary organisation, but are also cooperating with the military much more closely, and much more often. Such collaboration has become formalised through co-operation and interoperability doctrines, meaning

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that the police receive training from the military about "non-lethal" tactics – including detention, patrols, and the alignment of military and police practice. This manifested in their joint crackdown on Western Sydney at the height of lockdowns, and in response to the Lismore floods – both authoritarian measures to restore "order" following disasters, thinly veiled as "public service". Such occurrences can only be expected to become more frequent in the future. This growing lack of distinction between the police and the military make it imperative that an anti-carceral movement is necessarily *anti-imperialist* and *internationalist*.

It's clear that these anti-protest laws need to be smashed, and that cops should have their access to firearms limited, particularly in the aftermath of the Beaumont Lamarre-Condon case. But this recognition alone is too limited a perspective! The reality is that the anti-protest laws are only truly as effective as the power of law enforcement. Challenging police authority not only works to undermine the legitimacy of the enforcement of the anti-protest laws, but it also paves the way for the movement to proceed with clarity under inevitable further legal attacks.

We must reorientate, and look to communities such as the Yuendumu – who in their statement of demands in 2022, called for the disarming and defunding of the Northern Territory Police, with those funds being directed instead towards community controlled alternatives. More locally, we can look at Pride in Protest – who have consistently called for the abolition of the carceral system, and the removal of cops and screws from community events like the Mardi Gras Parade. Such a reorientation necessarily means reviving the BLM movement. Following the Voice referendum we have seen a dearth in Blak anti-colonial solidarity. We need to start mending the deep rifts within the left, caused by the vicious identity politics of the Yes vote. We should be looking back at the large open meetings that were held at the height of the BLM movement as a source of inspiration for building the movement back up.

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Fundamentally, we all know the class nature of the institution and their role in reproducing capitalism. We also know the horrific history of racism, queerphobia, and sexism as well. The police cannot be reformed. They need to be dismantled at their root, just like all other aspects of class society. So yes – down with the anti-protest laws, and yes to cops out of Mardi Gras. But also yes to cops out of Trades Hall, yes to their disarmament, and ultimately their entire abolition. Without mass movements that know their own class enemies, how can we truly hope to overcome capitalism itself? Or prevent the state from simply redirecting resources to domestic military forces that would take up the reins of the police in their absence?

These are ambitious goals, but so is our ultimate goal of a stateless communism. The right steps must be taken to get there. Malatesta put it succinctly when he wrote that "whoever sets out on the highroad and takes a wrong turn does not go where he intends to go, but where the road leads him." Let's not take a wrong turn.

WHAT IS BLACK FLAG SYDNEY?

Black Flag Sydney is a collective of anarchist-communist workers who organise mainly on unceded Gadigal land. Our ultimate goal is to build a society free of states, classes and currency, in order to achieve collective self-emancipation and universal freedom for all. Direct action is our method and worker self-management is our vision for today and the future. We aim not only to dismantle systems of capitalist exploitation, but to build the capacity for people to freely and truly self-manage their workplaces, communities, and lives.